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PUTTING IT TOGETHER

HOW TECHNOLOGY HELPS GROUP COORDINATORS AND HOTEL MANAGERS HANDLE THE INCREASING COMPLEXITY OF GROUP VISITS

Group.

It's such a nice, innocuous word, with encouraging visions of large blocks of room nights sold in a single stroke to a whole set of guests with identical needs and characteristics. Simple and delightfully profitable compared with the effort and personal attention required to book even a single individual's one-night stay.

Pity it's not really like that. To be sure, group members obviously do have many characteristics in common, and a group booking does sell a significant chunk of business at one time. But as anyone who has dealt with them knows, groups are made up of multiple individuals, each with their own preferences and agendas, and the group activity actually adds a whole additional layer of complexity on top of that mix.

People have different room-sharing requests, which always seem to change right up to (and after) check-in. Some want to arrive before the group block, some to stay later, and of course they'd like to take advantage of whatever discounted rate the group has negotiated. Spouses may accompany corporate guests and need separate activities scheduled. Meeting and conference planners need different combinations of function rooms, F&B services and activities scheduled – all of which

can change at any time – and they often have specific corporate travel policies restricting their choices. And the list goes on.

The people in the middle – the group coordinator/meeting planner and the hotel sales manager – have unbelievably challenging jobs to manage all the complexities of group business. This article takes a look at some of the ways technology helps them.

Where to Stay

For the group coordinator it all starts with finding somewhere to stay or to hold the meeting or conference. (For hotel sales managers it starts with identifying groups that might be interested in staying at their property, but this article is focused more on the customer side. For a recent discussion of sales tools, see "Making Connections," in *Hospitality Upgrade*, Fall 2002.)

These days the tediousness of researching potential properties, issuing RFPs and reviewing the responses has been enormously simplified by the Internet. Web sites such as Plansoft's mpoint.com, b-there.com, seeUthere, geftThere and StarCite maintain databases of properties interested in hosting group and meeting business. They help companies narrow their choices, filtering the properties by location,

Group Management < By Code >

Code: 1000KZ	Type: G Group
Name: American Medical Assoc.	Master: []
	Rollover: 100000 GROUP ROLLOVER PLAN 1

Contact: Nancy Jo Smith	Arrival: 02/03/2001 Tuesday Rooms: 11
Phone1: 217-334-3344 Office	Depart: 02/09/2001 Friday Block Ref: []
Phone2: 217-339-4001 Cell	Est. Rate: 188
Phone3: 217-895-6696 Office Fax	Comment: Rooming List Only
Phone4: 217-554-8856 Corp Office	Action Date: 01/03/2001 Wednesday Rooming list due
Address1: 582 Park Plaza	Cutoff: 01/04/2001 Thursday Release Block
Address2: Suite 354-B	Date1: 01/29/2001 Monday Pre-Con
City: Tempe	Date2: 02/12/2001 Monday Post-Con
State: AZ	Date3: 11/20/2002 Wednesday Follow up for 03
Zip: 89766	Date4: / /
Country: United States	Date5: / /

Corp: NCCTR National Council	Created: 01/03/2001 Wednesday	Last Edit: / /
Rank: A High	User: MC	
MarketSeg: G Group	MastrAcct: []	
Sub-Mrkt: ASC Association	Industry: []	
Language: E English	Sales Off: SWU CorpTier: A	
	Sales Rep: MCS LocTier: A	

Buttons: Add, Generate, Interfaces, Routing Profiles, Routing Schedule, 1. Folo, Blocking, Reservation Zoom, Cube, Order, Escape, Edit, Special Billing, Bulk Transfer, Rollover, Group Messaging, Open Template, Find, Scan, Kill, Batch Post, Block Log

Figure 1. PMS/S&C interfaces are getting tighter and more comprehensive - PMS Group Master screen for a two-day event, showing action date schedule automatically populated from an interfaced S&C system. Screen also includes buttons for access to special billing/charge routing instructions, room block details and group messaging functions, among others. Screen courtesy of Springer Miller Systems, Inc., from a system interfaced to Newmarket's Delphi S&C system.



...Consolidation here could be the key to significantly increased growth in their usage, and would also help to standardize the various RFP formats.

size and facilities, and provide electronic RFP forms to send to those identified as possibles.

As with many other travel sites, each has a slightly different focus, and it can take a little work to find the one(s) with the best matches for any particular company's business and needs. Some consolidation here could be the key to significantly increased growth in their usage, and would also help to standardize the various RFP formats. Newmarket's MeetingBroker service helps in translating many of these into a standard new-prospect action item for its widely used Delphi sales and catering (S&C) system, but even that still requires a manual evaluation of each lead before a response can be sent. Standardized formats would make it easier for the hoteliers to use automated tools to respond to the flood of similar inquiries with much less manual data entry, but for now it's still a chore on both sides to filter out the most likely deals and follow up with personal contacts.

Nevertheless the use of these sites can only grow, and not just as research tools for new business. Any company that settles on one site to handle all its group and meeting booking activity will see major benefits from such centralized records. Different divisions in a company can check on what each is doing, to avoid conflicts and possibly to combine events. Administrative assistants organizing smaller meetings can see the bigger picture for their company's activity and negotiate from a position of much greater strength and lesser risk. Also, company meeting and travel policies (including expense reimbursement) can be made available simply to all planners. As usual, seeing the bigger picture helps everyone.

Oh, Say Can You See?

Once the planner has a list of potential choices for any event, from a series of tour group stays to a single meeting, in order to make a decision the group coordinator still needs to see the property to check the guestrooms, restaurants, meeting facilities and general ambience. While physical site visits are still ideal, this walk-around is increasingly being done via the Internet.

Most property Web sites have floor plans and photos of the various function rooms and guestrooms. The more effective ones make these as interactive as possible, all the way up to virtual walkthroughs with full 360-degree panoramas. Being able to rotate

Meeting Trends : Technology Rules

Benchmark Hospitality is a thriving, multi-national organization that manages 26 resorts, conference centers and hotels in the United States, Canada and Japan. Each year, it tracks the "Ten Meeting Industry Trends" observed by its properties. The biggest change over the last 12 months has been that technology has risen dramatically in importance from No. 8 to the No. 1 position for 2003. However, the broad importance of technology is emphasized even more by the fact that systems-related issues also appeared at positions 4, 6 and 9.

The top 10 trends for 2003 are:

#1 | Technology Rules

Demand for T1 lines, wireless Internet and high-speed Internet access in guestrooms is becoming the norm for meeting planners today. Customers are requiring more advanced technology than ever before but are less willing to pay upgrade charges for it. LCD and data projectors are rapidly becoming the new standard for meetings.

#2 | Meetings Are Strategic and Higher Level

#3 | Shrinking Meeting Budgets Leads to a Buyers' Market

#4 | Intense Pricing Pressure Leads to Creative Packaging

Intense pricing pressure from customers and from increased competition is generating creative responses in the form of packages completely customized for the client.

#5 | Shorter, More Cost-Efficient Meetings

#6 | Web Sites Excel in Developing New Business

Property Web sites are important for developing new business relationships and generating requests for proposals. E-mail is preferred to solicit and deliver meeting proposals to first-time customers, but the telephone and one-on-one conversations remain preferred for long-term customers.

#7 | Booking Pace in the First Quarter Shows Improvement

#8 | Private Functions Continue, But Scaled Back

#9 | Demand for Videoconferencing Nearly Non-existent

After Sept. 11 videoconferencing seemed to offer tremendous opportunity, but demand quickly tapered off, and today is nearly non-existent.

#10 | Fewer Professional Meeting Planners

As companies continue to trim personnel budgets, site and budget decisions for meetings are being assumed by more senior-level management, who delegate coordination to their administrative assistants. A growing number of companies are outsourcing all of their meeting and event business to third-party planners.

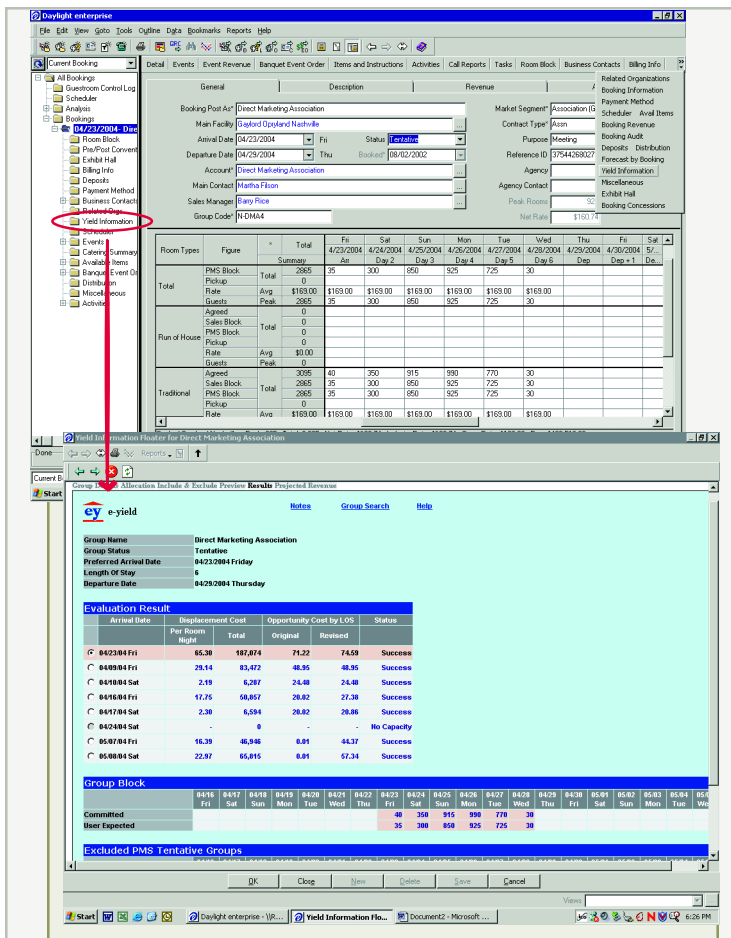


Figure 2 : Interfaced yield management and sales & catering - a drop-down menu on the Group Master screen for a potential multi-day group event lets the user analyze the stay parameters with an interfaced yield management engine, showing (in this case) the displacement cost for various possible arrival dates. The lower the displacement cost, the lower the rate the hotel can offer the group and still make a good profit.

Screens courtesy of Daylight Software, Inc., from a system interfaced to IDEaS, Inc.'s yield management application.

a room photo to look all around adds a far more vivid impression of being right there than any still photo can. This is a huge help in minimizing travel costs and time for group planners.

Even with still photos, though, current interactive techniques (such as from Virtual Visit) allow Web site visitors to start at a photo of the hotel and then take their own self-guided tours, clicking on various areas of the hotel to see different views and rooms. On a more detailed level, function room planning software such as MeetingMatrix, RoomViewer and Optimum Settings can take the basic set-up information for a potential event and quickly produce detailed layout diagrams of the function space, even down to photos of the place settings and table decorations. This is a significant help in closing the sale and in avoiding misunderstandings.

Do You Yield?

Negotiations with individual properties on the actual group stay dates and rates can be very complicated. A property must know the predicted booking pace and stay patterns of all its market segments

to make good decisions on what rate to offer for a group's different possible arrival dates, taking the displacement of potentially higher-paying business into account. Care must also be taken to balance a group's needs for spa, golf and other activity bookings with those of regular guests and club members.

Making these decisions means constant checking among the property management systems (PMS), S&C and activity booking systems to verify

availability and to make revenue yield judgments based on other business expected for the same date range. This is a hugely complex task if all areas are to be considered. Fortunately, there's been a significant increase both in developing more integrated single-vendor systems (and more tightly interfaced systems from multiple vendors) and in linking them to automated revenue/yield management systems such as IDEaS, OPUS 2, maxim and Optims. Clearly, the property with the tightest integration between all these functions is in the best position to evaluate its alternatives and to offer a potential group the best deal for both parties. There's no substitute for fully costed information on the various date options available.

And while we're on the subject of integration, if a client's booking dates shift after the initial blocks have been set, a hotel sales manager is going to be more willing to explore alternative dates if they know that all the ancillary bookings for function space, spa and golf activities will be automatically verified for availability on the new dates too. Integration pays off for everyone.

Details, Details, Details

Now the site has been selected. Next comes the painstakingly detailed work of filling out the group master record with all the minutiae of its billing and activity requests, entering the guests' reservations and making sure all the details of each function are set up properly.

The PMS is still the base system for handling the more complex functionality of group bookings, covering the myriad details of group members' names, addresses and profile data, rooming requirements (room type, sharing arrangements), activities/package plan details and special billing. A multi-day group booking at a resort can be amazingly complicated, typically involving different quantities of different room types on different days of the stay, each with a different negotiated discount rate. The property must decide whether guests arriving or departing on shoulder days on either side of the group block will be given the group discount or charged some other rate.

Multiple events may be held in different rooms with different setups and food and beverage (F&B) or audio-visual needs. The group may also involve both scheduled and optional functions and possibly spouse tours or other activities. And we all know menus, audio-visual needs and room layouts can change several times between the initial

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Gaylord Gets Groups

**Do you think hosting large groups in a hospitality setting is a challenge?
Gaylord Hotels doesn't.**

Between its 2,881-room Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville, Tenn., its 1,406-room Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center in Kissimmee, Fla., and its 1,511-room Gaylord Opryland Texas Resort & Convention Center in Grapevine, Texas scheduled to open in April 2004, Gaylord Hotels is setting the standard of providing technology service to large convention groups.

Gaylord Hotels has a history of leveraging technology to manage groups and conventions with tremendous success. Unafraid to try out new ideas if it will provide a competitive edge, Gaylord Hotels is utilizing cutting-edge technology to deliver stellar service to its guests.

"One area that's making a significant impact is the integration of revenue management with our PMS and Daylight's enterprise S&C systems," said Craig Ratterman, director of strategic systems. "Sales leads are managed from an enterprise system for all Gaylord Hotels. We've automated the RFP process including the ability to centrally manage and distribute leads to one or all properties for review.

"Each lead is then run through revenue management to find the best dates for each piece of potential business. Because of this integration with both S&C and PMS, sales managers easily have the most accurate information to work with whatever degree of flexibility a client may have.

"Gaylord Hotels then sets up group-specific Web sites for attendees, and can accept rooming lists from any group that sends them in electronic format. They also use wireless terminals at check-in to give maximum flexibility, and give each attendee an individually customized map with directions to their room and to their conference's registration and location information.

"We've also begun upgrading our in-room technology beyond traditional HSIA for the brand," Ratterman said. "We've integrated Sprint/KoolConnect's services with the PMS and S&C systems creating a robust portal called Gaylord iConnect. Guests can do all the obvious things such as surf the Internet, watch movies, review their account and check out via the monitor screen."

With the new Gaylord iConnect technology, convention goers can also see their group members' phone extensions and check their convention schedule. They can view a welcome message and other e-mails from their group, check property maps to find their specific events, visit the layout of the exhibit hall and find out where the booths are – all online. The robust portal was developed with direct input from the meeting planner community to change the way planners, attendees and hotel operations communicate.

"Because of the size and complexity of our operations, we've gone with a best-of-breed approach to the different major systems rather than look for a single system to do everything," Ratterman said. "But integrating these systems together as tightly as we've done allows us to keep everything synchronized while still maintaining the specific functionality and different management needs of each department."

Sounds like the right group of products to give world-class service to the right groups.

booking and the group's arrival. A S&C system that can set up complex banquet event orders (BEOs) swiftly and flexibly, and can track changes to them, is a significant advantage. A nice touch from some (such as Northwind's Maestro) is the ability to send messages about BEO changes only to those affected by them such as menu changes to the chef, set-up changes to the stewards, and so on.

The ease of setting up group members' individual reservations also varies considerably between different PMSs, both for individual pick-up as guests call in or when entering a rooming list supplied by the group organizer. Given the frequency with which rooming information changes before a group arrives and the high potential for error in re-keying names and dates from a printed list, it's becoming more common for PMSs to provide outside access for group coordinators to enter their own rooming lists, usually through password-protected access from the hotel's Web site. This simplifies things for the property and gives the coordinator more direct control over room assignments and sharing arrangements. But it also makes a system's ease of use even more important. The coordinator must be able to understand and use the entry and reporting screens intuitively.

The PMS must also be flexible enough to handle a group's special billing routing. Often, the group master folio will pick up room costs, some meals and certain specified activities, leaving everything else on the individual guest's folio; the situation may be complicated if two guests sharing a room are on different packages, each covering some room revenue. Groups also give members a dollar allowance toward activities in multiple, unconnected departments (e.g. \$100 toward either golf, spa or horseback riding, at the guest's choice) as well as covering bellman tips on the days of arrival and departure. Not all PMSs can handle this level of complexity, and even those that can differ significantly in ease of use in setting up the packages and monitoring their usage.

Most of this group detail is entered in the property management system, although function space and food

and beverage requirements usually remain in the S&C system. Traditionally these have been separate systems, with at best a simple interface to pass guestroom availability from the property management system to the S&C and basic group master data back to the property management system. Tighter integration is far more effective, though. Several property management system vendors have added fully integrated S&C modules to their software (good examples are from Fidelio, Visual One, MSI and Northwind), and traditional S&C specialists such as Newmarket and Daylight have stepped up to the challenge with increasingly sophisticated two-way interfaces to a variety of property management systems.

Powerful, flexible and well-integrated systems obviously make a huge difference to the sales manager's ability to provide the group with a satisfying experience. This is vital; meeting planners are a hyper-critical bunch, far more likely than an individual guest to complain if something is not right (see sidebar below). And they're a tightly knit group, much more likely to spread the word about good and bad experiences than individual travelers. Recovery from missteps is nice, but planners have proven time and again that they're only impressed when nothing goes wrong in the first place.

Conventional Considerations

Major conventions and conferences offer additional challenges, especially when they are big enough to require guestrooms at several hotels. Specialized meeting registration and multi-property housing packages such as Passkey, b-there, seeUthere and Event411 can be a tremendous help. Frequently used by convention and visitors bureau (CVB) operations, they provide a central Web site where group members can book guestrooms from the allotments set aside by each participating hotel, and can register for the main events and their break-out sessions. At the booking cut-off date, all room bookings and unused inventory are transferred down to the individual properties' property management systems.

Improvements on the horizon will simplify this complex arrangement by providing better (and two-way) interfaces with the hotel property management systems and S&C systems, for more complete and accurate control of the guestroom availability and function room bookings. Group members will be able to go on waitlists for alternate hotels if their first choice is unavailable, and be automatically matched with a roommate based on their preferences. Meeting registrants who haven't booked a guestroom can

Meeting Planners : A Tough Crowd to Please

It's no surprise that, according to a survey by J.D. Power and Associates last August, "higher meeting planner satisfaction leads to greater loyalty and an increasing rate of return for hotels." But it's the findings behind this conclusion that emphasize the power of outstanding service to leverage more business.

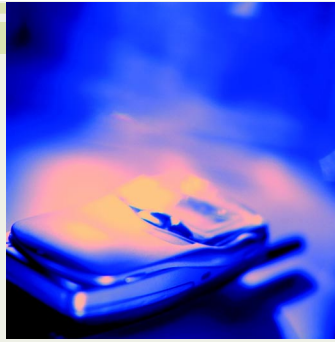
The 2002 Meeting Planner Satisfaction Index Study, which asked 1,400 independent and corporate meeting planners how well upscale and luxury hotels satisfied their needs, found that the hotels with the highest satisfaction scores get significantly more repeat business and receive more recommendations. A merely good experience has far less impact, and one where there was any problem at all gathers dramatically lower ratings, even if the problem was fixed promptly.

Flawless execution is far more impressive

and leads to greater returns from this particularly demanding client group. And flawless execution requires meticulous attention to detail at every stage, and full and accurate information being available to all staff in contact with the group. You can't do that without the right systems.

Unlike individual guests, who report 80 percent of problems to hotel staff, meeting planners report 97 percent of problems encountered during an event, yet only 57 percent of those problems are actually resolved. Interestingly, though, 89 percent of meeting planners reported that their experiences with hotels met or exceeded their expectations, which carries the sad implication that planners have grown to expect problems.

But it's those properties that exceed expectations and provide flawless service that get the repeat business.



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be sent an automated e-mail or fax, followed by a telemarketing call within 48 hours. And, of course, some sites are inevitably beginning to add travel booking and event marketing in an attempt to become one-stop-shops for the complete event.

Internet usage to book these events is growing as more options are provided to empower the visitor to make choices, but voice centers are still essential to handle exceptions. And as usual the Internet keeps hotels honest; if visitors can't get their preferred hotel they can easily check for lower rates elsewhere. The CVBs and housing sites currently have to run manual checks to see what's available outside their allocated blocks and ask hotels to suppress rates that are lower than those negotiated for the event, but this process could easily be automated.

Check-In

Many group check-ins are chaotic, especially for tours. Instant lines of tired guests, all needing their room keys, meeting/activity itineraries and tour/package confirmations at once, and often asking for room changes or different sharing arrangements. To minimize the impact on individual travelers, most hotels process them in an area away from the front desk. Many properties have pre-wired network connections in likely locations where they can quickly set up a spare workstation, but wireless networks now provide significantly greater flexibility, allowing groups to be handled wherever it's most convenient.

On the software side, pre-assigning

room numbers and generating room keys are clearly essential, along with a single-action check-in of all group members. But there will always be last-minute changes in guest names and room/sharing preferences, so a PMS that allows the staff to make these alterations quickly and intuitively (and to cut new keys on the fly) can be a major advantage in minimizing delays for the guests. Some casinos speed the guest into action even faster by combining the functions of a guestroom key with a gambling ID card. This allows guests to head straight for the gambling area and begin playing while their bags are taken up to their rooms.

Another common experience is for tour groups to arrive in the morning, before all rooms have been prepared for them. Many property management systems can now handle this by performing a soft check-in for them, recording the fact that the guests are onsite and allowing them charging privileges at the outlets while their rooms are readied. Some (such as Fidelio's Opera) take this a stage further by putting a housekeeping priority flag on any room type for which a guest is waiting, and alerting the front desk as soon as one is available.

While You're Here

As the meetings market has become more competitive, the use of technology to provide a more productive and useful environment for the attendees has grown enormously. Providing high-speed Internet access in all function rooms has become a standard, and wireless access has made this both

easier and more flexible. Some convention and exhibition halls are also beginning to provide wireless networks over which attendees can access exhibit directories, seminar schedules and more, but some new gadgets are taking this in fascinating new directions.

Although the use of cell phones and PDAs has exploded, they don't always work well inside large meeting facilities such as convention centers. Several new products are making a big difference to the interaction between group members and their peers at these events. A conference-specific Web site combined with a wireless LAN within the exhibition/conference area will let attendees download the schedule, receive updates, check the exhibition floor guide for specific vendors or product types, and perhaps even set up instant messaging (IM) for each specific group.

With infrared, beaming business card information exchange between PDAs is easy and could be extended to exhibitors' lead-collection hardware at each booth. Bar coded and magnetic-coded ID badges have allowed exhibitors to gather potential contact data for years, but the cost of radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags has fallen so far that it's now feasible to embed them in badges. Since these little devices can be interrogated electronically and unobtrusively from a range of a few feet, the potential exists for exhibitors to be able to capture visitor information automatically without having to swipe a badge. It's also relatively simple for devices at each conference or break-out room doorway not only to count

how many people attend each session, but to identify who they are, ensuring they're in the right session.

The current hot item in Europe is Swiss vendor Shockfish's Spotme PDA. This little device can be loaded with information on the conference schedule, exhibits and attendees (including photos and other information they're willing to share), and includes a short-range tracking device. Since the units can recognize each other, they can alert an attendee when someone she wants to meet comes within 30 feet, displaying the contact's name and photo on the PDA screen. Which of us with failing memories and eyesight wouldn't want that?

Away from the conference locations, guestroom video services (which used to be just pay-per-view movie channels) have expanded tremendously in scope and in interface capabilities with other systems as they've switched to digital transmission. Since the PMS knows which group a guest belongs to, it can easily show him his group's schedule and meeting room locations on the guestroom television, and restrict him from seeing other groups' details.

Conference seminar and general sessions can be video recorded and re-transmitted on in-room TV channels to allow delegates to catch up with sessions they missed, and can be made available on CD-ROM, DVD or Web site streaming video for later viewing. Well-established vendors On Command and LodgeNet both now offer digital services, but newcomers such as Sprint/KoolConnect and Unisys are proving especially nimble in developing new ideas.

On the PMS and PBX side it has become much easier to send both voice and text messages to some or all members of a group, and the small but growing number of hotels with IP telephone systems can set the guestroom phones to display the names of other members of a guest's group, allowing for instant room-to-room dialing. The potential for systems and data interaction is just exploding.

Getting feedback after meetings and conventions also benefits considerably from modern technology. Hand-written forms are tedious to complete and transcribe, and asking attendees to complete e-mail surveys some time after the event is usually ineffective, as their interest in responding fades as

Groups can be exceptionally complicated creatures, but they represent a highly lucrative, and ever-growing, proportion of the hospitality business.

quickly as their ability to recall their issues. However, putting kiosks in the break area outside the meeting rooms can generate a much greater and higher-quality response. Some organizers are even renting PDAs for attendees to use for rapid survey input and feedback both to the group and to the organizers, offering the chance to address issues while the event is still in progress.

Time to Leave

Group check-outs aren't usually quite as chaotic as check-ins, but a couple of PMS features can make them much smoother. First, of course, is the clear and accurate division of charges between the group master account and the individual guest folios. If it's easy to see that this has been accomplished well, the number of disputed charges, folio corrections and upset guests can be significantly minimized.

Then there's the need for flexibility in reporting on group folios. Most property management systems include a single-action group check-out for all members due to leave that day and with a zero folio balance, and tour groups in particular need to identify which members still have outstanding balances that need to be cleared.

The flexibility comes in because it often seems that every group coordinator wants the charges on the group master broken out in a different way, by guest, by day, by charge department, by amount and so on. And it's certainly not unknown for groups to change their minds about the special billing arrangements during the course of their stay, deciding, for example, to pick up breakfast charges or phone calls when these had originally been assigned to the individuals' accounts.

A PMS that can re-assign these changes instantly and retroactively, and offers significant flexibility in the filtering, sorting and printing format of group master folios will have major advantages in allowing the hotel

staff to interact with the group coordinator in a calm, confident manner.

Y'all Come Back Now

Finally, post-event reporting can be a great help, both internally and externally. It's all too easy for the simple courtesy of a follow-up thank-you call or e-mail to be overlooked, but automating it so that an e-mail is sent to the group coordinator a day or so after departure opens up other possibilities. Obviously this can include not only a simple *how did we do?* feedback survey but also it may generate future business if you can determine where the group expects to hold its next meeting and can offer contact data for another hotel in your company to follow up with.

Internally, of course, there's the opportunity for all involved with the group to record their comments on the stay, including any problems that arose and how they were resolved. This is essential both for immediate follow-up on anything outstanding and to maintain a complete picture of the group's business when future sales calls are made. This is obviously another area where integrated systems have clear advantages; if there's a single location where sales managers, convention services staff, stewards, spa managers, golf professionals and restaurant managers can record their comments about a specific group event, it's far more likely both to happen and to be useful.

Groups can be exceptionally complicated creatures, but they represent a highly lucrative, and ever-growing, proportion of the hospitality business. Significant advances in the systems that manage their experiences at every stage of a visit have given hotels and resorts much more powerful and flexible tools to handle their complex demands.

But it's the interaction between these systems, triggered by modern communications and interface techniques, that has really made the difference. The creativity being applied to resolve old issues and provide previously impossible new levels of service is just amazing, and we've only just begun to tap the possibilities.

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